

# SUBTERRANEA BRITANNICA

SECRETARY'S NEWSLETTER NO 20

1998

## Editorial

Your editor has been struggling away with newsletters for some years. This year he has found it difficult to find time and hence you haven't had a newsletter for some while. However things are now looking brighter and the newsletters should start to flow again provided material is sent in. To speed things up it has been decided to produce more frequent but shorter newsletters.

A feature of this newsletter is the amount of material sent in from Brian Clarke mainly giving an account of the changes in the Bath area. This involves various underground sites including those from the Cold War. Unfortunately because of the delay in the newsletter some of the material is a little out of date but it is still interesting and important. Special apologies to Brian for the delay.

Thanks in good part to Brian, the story of the Combe Down Stone Mines (underground quarries) has been related in these columns for some years. It seems to go from farce to farce. Originally Bath and North East Somerset Council employed expensive consultants to decide that the mines needed filling. Sub. Brit. protested that the mines were historically important, that the proposed filling material was unsafe and that money would not be available from the government to fund the scheme - and it wasn't. The council have now employed another lot of consultants - mediation experts! to sort out the ensuing muddle and soothe over the ensuing public relations disaster. Also it does not surprise Sub. Brit, to learn that, 'Routine monitoring of the fabric inside the mines was halted back in June after no changes were detected in six years of visual inspections.' But read on later...

This newsletter comes with a separate copy of Sub. Brit's safety guidelines. The guidelines have been previously published in the newsletter but members now have a handier copy. Please detach from the back of the newsletter.

Please take heed of these guidelines. Apart from safety, Sub.Brit's reputation depends on them being observed.

On a recent trip at Drakelow a member could not be accounted for at the end of the trip. The site operator had no option but to go back and thoroughly search and re-search this complex site - a time consuming, and as it turned out futile operation. Unpleasantness resulted when the member turned up having left the site with no-one's knowledge.

Rigid application of the guidelines at this particular site would have probably seemed officious and pompous but it might have averted a damaging public relations incident. i.e. Groups going underground (or on site) should appoint a leader who goes first and keeps track of his group at all times.

## The Next Day Conference is in London.

13th March 1999

Details will be sent out later.

## Welcome

The usual welcome list of new members is held back until next time.

## Subject for Discussion - Letter Sent to the Editor.

I've recently been reading the fascinating book on the Viet Cong and the US 'tunnel rats' in the Vietnam War - The Tunnels of Cu Chi. This stimulated my curiosity as to how often and when underground structures have been used for 'semi-legal' activities; e.g. crime, guerilla warfare (e.g. a friend told me about the use of a cave system as a refuge in the Eritrean civil war) or as political activity (perhaps the now famous swampy).

One example of criminal usage which immediately comes to mind was smuggling (particularly prevalent on parts of the Sussex coast I believe. I also wondered if nefarious use was ever made of,

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for example, the Paris catacombs or London's Tunnels etc.

If you or anyone else can provide me with any information on this broad subject or refer me to sources I would be most grateful.

Dominic Franklin.

**Note.** Please reply via Editor. Not to Dominic directly

### Appeal for Information

Do you have any information about the NATO Forward Scatter Station at Cold Blow Lane, Maidstone, Kent? This has recently been scrapped and was built around 1960. It appeared to operate on a Frequency Modulated System at about 1000 MHz and at 10KW power and was directly linked to ROC posts, police stations etc. to give the 'Four Minute Warning'. The principle of Forward Scatter at VHF frequencies is well known (and is used by radio amateurs at a much lower power) but the Institution of Electrical Engineers has nothing in their library (that I can find) on BMEWS applications.

Apparently 'Ace High' was an associated code name.

Any information on history, operating or technology would be much appreciated. Of course I would be happy to pay any associated costs.

Richard Stoodley. Ragged House, Egerton, Ashford, Kent. TN27 9ER

### Sub Brit. French Weekend, 8 - 10 May 1999

In 1999, in addition to the normal UK Study Weekend, we are trying to link up with the French society, Societe Francaise d'etude des Souterrains, whose annual congress will be based at Auxi le Château (Pas de Calais) from 8 - 10 May.

Sylvia and Alan Beamon, who have enjoyed all of the previous weekends that they have attended, and made many contacts, are keen to maintain the Anglo-French links. They are therefore, volunteering to co-ordinate the visit for Sub. Brit. members who are interested.

The provisional programme includes: lectures, visits to sites, receptions and the inevitable and enviable long communal lunches and dinners.

In the first instance, would those who would like more details contact them at:

2 Morton Street, Royston, Herts. SG8 7AZ  
Tel. 01763/242120 or FAX 01223 235503  
(regret no E-Mail).

They already have the initial timetable and hopefully soon will have hotel details. Dependent upon numbers, it may also be possible to combine transport into one small coach.

### Bank of England Vaults

The Guardian 9th December 1998 shows a beautiful 3-dimensional drawing of the Bank of England, including, they say, the two or three floors of underground vaults containing the gold reserves of some 70 countries. The elaborate security system includes 2ft. thick steel doors and a subterranean control room with clerks controlling people movements. From these enormous vaults the sound of trains in on one of the underground lines can be heard rumbling by. Some of the gold seems destined to remain underground for all time. If country A pays country B in gold, the labels on a few gold bars are simply swapped around - at a price of course. And don't worry about Britain's gold reserves - most of it is held in New York. Never got back after WWII.

The Guardian claims that it is the first time in the bank's memory that a journalist has been allowed to enter the vaults. Obviously your secretary will be applying for a Sub. Brit. visit!

### Have You Received the Last Copy of Siren?

If you are on the list to receive Siren you should now have received Siren 6. Please contact Malcolm Tadd if you haven't or now wish to be on the list,

### Information Sheet

We are trying to produce a series of information sheets. The first one is on coprolite digging by Bernard O'Connor. Just send 50p to your editor for this single A4 sheet printed on both sides.

Could you produce an information sheet on some topic dear to your heart?

## Brian Clarke Reports.

MOD Land at Corsham, Monks Park and Rudloe Manor. Bath Chronicle 3.6.97

It was announced that MOD property at Spring Quarry, Corsham was to be sold and that North Wiltshire Council wanted it "developed for employment purposes" to replace the lost MOD jobs. Sale advertising was expected in Autumn 1997, to include surface land and approximately 35 acres underground. The Royal Arthur site in Corsham has already been sold and permission granted for a nursing home, close care apartments and 130 dwellings which would no doubt expunge all traces of the previous use and history. Monks Park MOD property was sold earlier this year for further use as an underground storage facility and nearby Hartham Quarry could also be released for sale soon. This depends on possible needs by other forces instead of the Royal Navy. The RAF has yet to make a decision on Rudloe Manor, which if redundant could be available for disposal by the year 2000. The council's Local Plan would require any new occupier to clear MOD surface buildings which may refer to slope shaft access and loading platforms.

Brian Clarke 7/97

Regional Government Headquarters. Chilmark. Western Daily Press 7-3-97

Under the droll title "The blast-proof home that's just perfect for the nuclear family", intended sale was announced for the redundant but complete and well maintained Regional Government, Headquarters bunker at Chilworth west of Salisbury. It is just over the road from a (disused) RAF bomb storage depot and was built in the mid-1980s. The Home Office instructed Portsmouth agents Building & Property Ltd to find a buyer, seeking six-figure bids. Deadline was 26th March. Retired civil servant Albert Panter said "Nobody takes much notice of it these days, although when it was first built it was regarded as something quite sinister. We had visions of Mrs. Thatcher disappearing down it to become a sort of prime minister-in-exile" Accommodation was provided for 150 hand-picked VIPs, trying trying to restore order after a devastating Soviet missile strike.

Shielded by a reinforced concrete shell, an earth-topped roof and blast-proof doors, the lucky (?) VIPs would have been completely self-contained with their own power supply, 71,000 litres of drinking water and a large stock pile of food. Five years ago the government decided the threat of nuclear war was remote enough to vacate this "grim edifice". Once a week, Gerry Osborne, from Lower Knole, Bristol has visited it on behalf of the Home Office to turn over the generators and keep an eye on the electricians. Pictures showed the entrance and some interior facilities. Further coverage was given on local television.

Brian Clarke 7/97

Farleigh Down Sidings Auctioned. Western Daily Express 7-3-97

Estate agents Hartnell Taylor Cook included this property in the catalogue of surplus British Rail Property Board land to be offered at auction in Bristol on 24th February. It was described as 5.26 acres with road access and having remains of old MOD buildings still existing on it. A slight puzzle is that, in the time when Monkton Farleigh ammunition depot which the siding served was a museum, land ownership was divided. BR property only extended to about half way along the loading platform whereas apparently at some time since, the remainder including the slope shaft has been acquired. This would make sense for reasons of access, the complication of a shared road being undesirable. Subsequent visits up to mid July have shown no discernable changes on site. The old "cut and cover" slope shaft, wrecked tram creeper and overgrown loading platform walls slumber peacefully. The steel doors remain cemented shut in the middle, sealing off the underground narrow gauge sidings (still with track in place but without any of the fifty Hudson trucks once stabled there) and 3/4 mile conveyor shaft to Main West haulage. Recent welds on the door show someone went in briefly. The top of the conveyor shaft is understood to be securely walled off by the new occupier Wansdyke Securities, still with enough bits of old steelwork thereby "preserved" thus far to show how the system worked. The most likely eventual end has to be infilling and levelling to remove this slight inconvenience to a new occupier.

Brian Clarke 7/97

Reopening of Eastlays (formerly Pictors Monks) as a Stone Quarry. Bath Chronicle 10-6-97 and local TV news 10-7-97

County Councillors in Wiltshire were to meet on 18th June to consider an application for reopening Eastlays (formerly Pictors Monks) as a stone quarry. Applicant Pictors Bath Stone said the operation would create six new jobs, that there would be no blasting and the 200,000 tonnes of imported stone in ten months of 1994 showed a need for more local supplies. The Stone Federation of Great Britain supports the venture which would meet an identified need for quality Bath stone. Planners received 13 letters of objection and eight in support. The proposed extraction of 3,600 tonnes of stone in each of three years would mean two lorry loads a day and no working on Sundays or public holidays. Objectors claimed there are sufficient reserves of high quality stone available in other mines, the operators of which would have to lay off workers. Neighbours were concerned about anticipated traffic and noise problems. County planners said there would be minimal adverse effects on the environment or neighbours and recommended granting of permission subject to 22 conditions. A bat survey by English Nature found (rather surprisingly) "little potential for the creatures to roost or hibernate". Eastlays is off Green Road at Chapel Knapp and operated as a quarry until requisitioned for munitions storage in the 1930s. Now most of the 37 acres of converted underground passages are used as a bonded warehouse and stores for redundant MOD equipment. A television item showed a discovery by the Mine Manager for Octavian Ltd, who had been picking white paint off the walls a bit at a time over a number of years. This had revealed wartime graffiti of historical interest. Such drawings and notations are common in all the converted stone workings, as those who explore them will be well aware. Even older legends are found in those parts left unconverted. All are worthy of study and recording which makes more recent crass daubings and sprayings with modern paint all the more unfortunate. At least this is not likely to happen at Eastlays, due to constant and vigilant site security.

Brian Clarke 7/97

Teenagers Lost in Box Quarry. Bath Chronicle 3-6-97 and Bath Advertiser 6-6-97

A teenage group of eight boys and one girl from Melksham and Devizes became lost for nearly five hours after entering the long disused Box underground stone quarries. According to reports, they "broke in" to explore as a Sunday evening birthday celebration for one of them. After their torches failed, they used cigarette lighters then later sparks from the flints and lights on their digital watches to make progress in the pitch darkness. Eventually one of them felt a draught which was followed to the securely locked steel door at the entrance of Cliftworks Passage. This fortunately has a bat access hole, through which their shouts attracted the attention of local resident Tony Scordialos. He said, "I heard this screaming and then they were shouting for help. They were like prisoners in there." Two fire crews from Corsham and Trowbridge took 15 minutes to cut through locks on the heavy door to rescue the relieved occupants. Although none of the party were injured, they did apologise and give a donation to the brigade benevolent fund. The articles then concludes with predictable warnings about the dangers of entering old mines, and the need for the quarry entrances to be securely sealed. Apparently, these individuals were at one point just yards from a 30ft well hole (which may be at the edge of the Cathedral). It was incorrectly stated that most of the old mine workings are unmapped and the maps which exist are not available to the public. The cave explorers maps are now very good and were (probably still are) available through a local public house.

Brian Clarke 7/97

International Nature Reserve for Bats? BBC1 local TV news 19-2-97

Conservationists, possibly from English Nature, were excited to find a large colony of bats "under Wiltshire hills" in numbers which had quadrupled since last surveyed. Calls for the quarry with 36 miles of workings to be declared an international nature reserve with "special site status" tend to identify it as the main part of Box stone quarries.

I was looking forward to checking the details but, alas, a repeat broadcast was cut short to make way for a review of the life of a dead Chinese dictator.

Brian Clarke 7/97

Coal Mines Under Houses and Gardens in  
Bristol. BBC local TV news 22/5/97 and  
Bristol Evening Post 25/6/97

BBC TV reported a new computer system has been produced to help house buyers, showing where old coal mine workings extend "under thousands of houses and gardens" in parts of Bristol. It also details, risk areas for radon gas. Recent film showed collapses due to old workings subsiding and dramatic stories of near escapes, for example when a garden was swallowed up shortly after children had been playing in it. For a fee of thirty pounds, a map showing the area around any particular property can be obtained. In a subsequent but related newspaper report, the new Labour government ordered an inquiry into the accuracy of records of mine shafts in the Bristol area. Energy Minister John Battle wanted to help people who fear the value of their homes has been slashed by uncharted shafts. Residents have to spend both time and money consulting two separate sets of archives. Kingswood MP Roger Berry said the inquiry would aim to match up information held by the Coal Authority and Bristol Coalmining Archives. Should this prove impossible, a "one stop shop" containing details from both would be set up. Dr. Berry had waged a long campaign on behalf of residents who found their homes to be blighted by disused shafts nearby. Some claimed to have lost half the value of their property. Just six months ago, the previous Conservative government refused to hold an inquiry, despite being urged to do so by an all-party committee of MPs. Many parts of Kingswood, St. George, Speedwell are thought to be honeycombed with old mine workings. Large scale coal mining took place in the Bristol area from around the 1850s to the 1920s, though smaller pits existed as early as Tudor times. Local people around Siston Common say three tall trees mark the site of a capped shaft, surrounded by gruffy undeveloped ground with grass or shrubs, and that a bramble patch nearby has a deep and

completely open shaft located in it. Many fences in the district use bits of old coal tram rail for posts and repairs. The geology of these mines is quite unstable in contrast to the stone quarries and anyone entering them would have to be rather crazy. Some do claim to have explored and found a Peckett steam winder engine still in place underground, probably about ten to fifteen years ago.

Combe Down Mines, Bath Chronicle

Various newspaper issues have confirmed the decision to do nothing and let matters go by default. A readers letter on 20-2 bemoaned loss of organised funding for infilling, under the title "forget crackpot ideas and do something". It was also critical of proposals for a museum in the quarry space. Building work at Rock Lane was described and pictured in the same issue. Developer Britannia Homes, later taken over by Bovis Homes have built 13 houses which involved breaking into the ceiling of the mine and infilling of part with foam concrete. Residents said this was only yards from Firs Field where sections have been fenced off "because the mines roof is so thin". Though they feared vibration from drilling, pile driving and heavy vehicles could affect the safety of their homes, Eddie Delaine representing the local authority was evidently satisfied with the outcome. He said "It demonstrates that it is possible in some instances to stabilise at a cost, and that the work being done has not had any long term detriment to the stability of the area." The site was to be monitored as a subsequent precaution. Another readers letter on 22-2 expressed great surprise at the conclusion of the mines report, which said that merely continuing to observe the slow deterioration was an "economic" solution. This left the occupants of forty blighted houses (deemed officially dangerous) with all the anxiety, feeling helpless and without hope. A locally based rescue fund was suggested, plus the withholding of Council Tax. This writer put her thoughts into action putting up a protest display outside the Bath Tourist Information office as reported on 20-3. She lobbied visitors to highlight her campaign, explaining how the mines which had provided Bath with its fine stone were now a threat of subsidence to local housing. She said after

wards "It went very well. We feel that if we (the residents) don't find a solution then who will? Quite a few people signed the petition..." However, in the face of a report from economists Ecotec concluding that the 20 million needed for stabilisation could NOT BE JUSTIFIED ON ECONOMIC GROUNDS, it is hardly surprising nothing more has happened as of July. The petition got 500 signatures and was given to the then Environment Minister David Curry. Cllr Roger Symonds said he intended to call for a meeting with the minister "after the General Election" so this exceedingly tedious hare may run further on that impetus.

Brian Clarke 7/97

#### New Partnership To Tackle Mines Dilemma

Bath Chronicle newspaper reported on 30th April 1998 that concerned residents and Councillors were to meet the following day for discussion of ways to tackle the problem of Combe Down stone mines. A partnership has been established between "action groups" and Bath & North East Somerset Council with regular meetings intended to decide how best to resolve the 6 year battle and get stabilisation of the underground quarry achieved. The quango English Heritage which deals with derelict land and the Government Office for the South West have refused to fund works.

The Government has promised to reexamine the issue but only when certain conditions have been met. The new partnership hopes to prepare and present a reduced cost scheme to Ministers. Liberal Democrat Councillor Roger Symonds said the work previously intended did not fit the criteria for Government funding so a more lowkey scheme would be sought which has local agreement. After seeing what ideas people have, the community should be fed information about the possibilities. Cllr Symonds would like to see a deadline set for a presentation to Government, say in 6 months. Previously, the Council had hoped to see part of the mines become a museum and infill or reinforce the rest but economists said that could not be justified.

It remains to be seen if the renewed bout of talking round the issues will amount to anything but it would seem to offer Sub. Brit. a window of opportunity to put the case for conservation and

protection rather than wholesale and insensitive destruction of the mines.

A Government Minister was booked to visit Bath to discuss problem of Combe Down Mines, the local press hyping this up degree of "new hope" that was quite ridiculous. The bubble pricked when the Minister had to cancel at the last minute attend an urgent vote in the House. I bet he won't re-book his visit but will drop it quietly with some relief.

Brian Clarke 4/98 8/98

**Note.** Owen Ward has sent a cutting from the Bath Chronicle of 21.11.98

It says, 'An independent consultant has been brought in to find out how Combe Down residents want the problem of unstable mines under their homes to be solved.'

'Estimates have put the costs of potential schemes at between 25-30 million.'

'Routine monitoring of the fabric inside the mines was halted back in June after no changes were detected in six years of monitoring.'

Note that the independent consultants are mediation experts

#### Lottery Bars for Browns Folly

The Heritage Lottery Fund has granted £20,000 for a package of works around the nature reserve at Monkton Farleigh, near Bath, which include various old stone mine entrances. Because these are home to rare bats, the previous policy of installing iron bars is to be renewed and continued. The Wildlife Trust regards this as one part of their wider programme of preserving habitats around the approximately 100 acres of woodland. The reporting makes no mention of provision for those who want to enter and explore the old mine workings.

Brian Clarke 5/98

#### Combe Down Railway Tunnel

The previously noted bid for lottery, largesse to create a public route has been turned down. The mistake was quite possibly not making purchase of scribbles by famously dead politicians central to the proposal, and overlooking inclusion of elite opera facilities. Worse than that, the completed project would actually have been much too useful for approval to seem tenable. We did at least get that walk

through inspection of the tunnel which could not otherwise have been done and which confirmed it remains sound after being abandoned since 1968.

Brian Clarke 7/97

### Bangor Tunnel Ranges

A sports magazine report of the Practical Rifle League round three competition shoot of February 9th 1997 described how it took place in two tunnels at Bangor, North Wales, which from the picture are almost certainly former standard gauge railway tunnels. They may in fact be one long tunnel with a robust dividing wall to create separate 100 yd. and 475 yd. range facilities. I cannot tell if this is the total tunnel length, or just that part which is not curved. The tunnel is brick lined and lit at measured intervals since distances underground are deceptive and could otherwise make effective aiming difficult. Amongst the novelties of this range which competitors remarked are never normally encountered in Practical Rifle are loading in the dark, lying on cold concrete, zero windage and target exposure controlled by illumination rather than turning mechanisms. The final stage of shooting involved engaging a target at 100 yards, then sprinting down to that target on the appearance of a second target 200 yards beyond, engaging same with a further ten rounds. All this apparently in the dark. As used to be done to minimise tired feet at Monkton Farleigh, the range staff here use a bicycle when the butts need attention. Perhaps someone with local knowledge might identify which railway company built the tunnel(s) at Bangor and what route they used to be on.

Brian Clarke

### Tunnel Finds in Farnham

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The old Maltings in Farnham are now an exhibition and trade venue. In olden times, a tramway used to run over the road, at the same level, and enter a "hole in the wall" which had wooden doors sliding on runners. This was used in connection with making and/or repair of wooden barrels for the Maltings but was a separate commercial concern from it. The road surface has been built up about 18 inches over the years since and the "hole in the wall" boarded over completely. A property owner adjoining the road

recently complained that his garden was flooded by water running down the hill and off the road. In conversation, the gentleman concerned mentioned that long disused rails of the barrel tramway remain in place running through the cellar of his house which must therefore be near the boarded up roadside entrance. An inspection may be arranged later which hopefully would reveal the gauge of the old track and how far it extends underground. It is thought no items of rolling stock survive on it. Apparently it was visited last year by a "tunnel society". Were these Sub. Brit. members and if so, what did they see?

Another gentleman who lives some 200 yards away on Abbey has a small back yard extending about 8ft to a sheer wall with earth bank on top. This is about at right angles to the tunnel described above. An arched entrance some 5 feet and 7 feet high is bricked up and hidden by a shed used for woodworking. Having lived there since 1940, the occupier at now has the curiosity to intend breaking down the blockage. This would be less to find out what lies beyond than to satisfy desire to extend the volume of his shed and expand woodworking activities! Suitable power tools were experted to hired "soon". However by 9/98 enquiries indicated no actual work had been done. His house is rather close to the arched entrance for a rail track even of narrow gauge to have emerged and turned to avoid it. As the house was built in the 1600's, this adds to the puzzle as it would have pre-dated any railway alignment.

Mike Hayter via Brian Clarke 5/98,9/98

### Further Legal Bat Protection

Local BBC television news reported briefly on 14/5/98 about Greater Horseshoe bats in the Forest of Dean. Their winter roosts in former ironstone mines are to be given new legal protection by (if I heard it correctly) English Heritage. Their other, summer roosts are already protected.

Brian Clarke 5/98

## Dover Interceptor

A 1600 metre long sewer tunnel has been driven by a contractor Nuttalls at Dover Harbour. with spray concrete lining large enough to have a 60cm (2ft) gauge construction through it and will carry pipes for a new Southern Water station at the seaward end. where there will be a new outfall into the Channel. A construction yard is situated at the southern end by the main BR railway line. Tunnel driving was achieved with a "Westfalia" machine. Spoil removal and concrete supply trains were hauled by four diesel hydraulic locomotives hired from Hunslet, assisted on the surface by shunting with a small Clayton battery electric loco. Works are expected to be complete in about half a years time. (Information gleaned from Mike Jackson's muchmore detailed report in the Narrow Gauge Railway Society members magazine. )

Brian Clarke 5/98

## More About Combe Down Railway Tunnel

Following rejection of a lottery bid for money to open the old Somerset & Dorset Railway tunnel. (previously reported) as part of a proposed cycling and walking route a one day opening was planned during July 1998 by owners Wessex Water. Rainwater was found to have seeped into the tunnel making ground conditions inside so wet that the event had to be cancelled. It was hoped another date might be set in late summer if conditions improved. Bob Bunyar wrote in the Chronicle newspaper that at a length of '1.829 yards this was the longest railway tunnel in Britain without any ventilation shafts. After closure of the railway route from Bath to Bournemouth in March 1966, track through the tunnel had been removed for scrap by the end of January 1968. The entrances were sealed about 20 years ago with welded steel doors

The Chronicle again covered 3rd September 1998 this time with 'scoop' news that Wessex Water intend "handing the tunnel over" to Dorset Railway Trust. Interestingly this outfit is fronted by one David Edwards who a key player in the late lamented Monkton Farleigh Mine Museum. The trust seems to be gathering up such bits and pieces of the now hopelessly fragmented old

railway route as may be had from time to time. Just what practical use could be made of the tunnel must be questioned as any track put through it would be well and truly isolated. Not letting this getting in the way of good story the Chronicle suggests a 'charity mounting bike trek through the tunnel' is planned and a new date of October 11th set for a walk through. It elevated the status of the tunnel as being the longest unvented one in Europe.

Local TV news had a piece on the steel door at the entrance portal as being hacked open as part of preparations to hand the tunnel over "when legal formalities are completed". Apparently Wessex Water bought it "because it is near to the pumping station at Tucking Mill" paying British Rail just one pound in the 1970s. I seem to remember something about Wessex Water having new American masters so perhaps they take a more realistic view that this white elephant should be unloaded forthwith. onto those who are probably the only outfit to actually want it even as a gift. It is a fairly safe bet the biggest cost David and friends might incur would be welding rods to keep the door secure during future years. Unless the cycle route idea rears up again, that is.

Brian Clarke 7/98 9/98

## Article Review

Secrets And Lines. (Monkton Farleigh depot)  
Steam World 9-98.

The author of this gushingly enthusiastic piece evidently did not have the benefit of basic information when preparing it.

The angle of the slope shaft at Farleigh Down is shallower than the indicated 45 degrees. Monkton Farleigh Depot was not on its own the largest ammunition dump in the world. It was one part of an establishment also including Tunnel, Eastlays and Ridge quarries which taken together as "Central Ammunition Depot' Corsham" may well have been the largest. The conveyor belt was not hidden in the depths of the building on the loading platform. The end of the belt is situated



under the far end of an earth bank which covers and partly disguises a transfer room roughly at right angles to the main line railway. The whole thing was done cut and cover and very shallow. Only half way up the hillside did the conveyor tunnel dive deep below ground, where the shape changes from a concrete box to a brick lined arch.

The underground power station was only ever intended for short term, emergency use and in fact only had one of the two specified generators installed. Normal power requirements were met from the National Grid. The generator could only have lit one District at a time, to permit evacuation of personnel. It could not have run the power-hungry fans, heaters or air conditioning which latter had coal fired boilers on the surface. A battery room beside the generator provided "some limited buffer stock of electricity.

The museum was open for almost exactly five years. The article does not mention the colliery electric "tram creeper" on the slope shaft at Farleigh Down, the claws of which moved the wagons on the slope. This and the pointwork for the wagons on the platform at the top were standard colliery kit of the era, as was the overhead cable haulage way along Main East. I would not describe this haulage as "elaborate". It just ran along one side of the Districts, with a winch at the top and a balanced return drum at the bottom. The cable ran suspended from "star wheel" pulleys which allowed the chains down to the wagons to pass through. A very similar facility also existed at Tunnel quarry and might yet be intact but long disused. The only reason they were put in was to handle those bombs which were too heavy for the conveyor belts to cope with. The cable/railway haulages were neither efficient nor popular, rather a necessary chore.

The floors were not laid with tarmac, but with a special formulation called "colas". This consisted of crushed coal and tar which could not spark, unlike tarmac which uses crushed stone. I really question the assertion that the mine museum would have stood a better chance of survival had it opened now. Competition for leisure business has become very tough indeed and a vast budget would have been required to bring the outfit up to anything like an acceptable standard for health & safety. As it was, the museum had the benefit of opening before the amount of vandalism and scrapping made it impossible, as it would

be now.

The establishment has been comprehensively pillaged and I probably have a better collection of representative equipment here at home than could ever be shown there to visitors now. I have not yet seen what the present partial use for commercial storage has meant for its actual condition. At Eastlays, it prevented vandalism but caused much equipment to go and structural alteration to occur.

I also question the wisdom of giving directions to find the location and the "happy hunting" ending. This is not open to the public and could well be dangerous for casual exploration. In parts, visitors might even be arrested as trespassers after triggering a security alarm system. I know it was put in as I heard it go off and saw staff responding (from a distance, when I was out for a walk through the area.)

Regarding the picture showing wagons being loaded, it has been speculated the overhead structure may have been the terminus of the "blondin" type cable way which was replaced by the conveyor tunnel as it could not cope with the volume traffic required. The upper terminus can still be seen between 19 and 20 District buildings, with the narrow gauge tracks associated.

Wagon 18 was always something of a celebrity during the time the museum was open, because it appeared in the picture. After closure, it was seen on Main East haulage but I do not know what became of it. I have (to quote but two) number 9 and 19 but sadly not 18.

The platform points at Farleigh Down were twice as complex as is visible in the picture. Half was easily robbed for scrap because it was set in wood, not concrete as in the picture. Four sets of tandem turnouts faced each other with six diamond crossings and four sets of more ordinary turnouts. There were also wagon turn tables behind the pillbox via which wagons could pass between the two platforms if the points at the incline were very busy.

The power station engine was restored and run by the museum, using parts from another identical engine in an associated depot still controlled by the military. Sadly the generator itself remained stripped of its copper and unable to produce any power.

The ground cover was in fact of varying depth because the mine workings followed the beds of

quality stone. Looking along Main East, it was quite obviously not level. Pushing wagons towards the foot of the slope shaft was hard work. I think the thinnest overburden was around South East, and you can still see clear evidence of extensive spoil tipping on the surface done during conversion.

The article did not mention the unconverted areas of mine workings, some still accessible and bearing many signs of occupation by the military during the travail of conversion. 19 District was to have been larger but was in the event too wet and even some parts of it converted were subsequently walled off.

Brian Clarke

Note. The article referred to by Brian is not reproduced in this letter since it would probably violate copyright. However it is a whimsical article on the-what-you-could-see-on-a-Sunday-afternoon-walk theme.

Monkton Farleigh is of a great deal of interest to many of our members and during the short period it was set up as a tourist attraction it was visited on a Sub. Brit. Study Weekend.

Ed.

### The Monastic Caverns of the Severn.

After the Severn has left the hilly country in which it has its source and before it becomes a great and important river it passes through a tract of country rich in historic interest.

In the cliffs by Redstone Ferry close to the headland where, when the Severn is in flood, the water often washes the base of the rock which, surmounted by overhanging ash trees and pines, projects above, there are some caves hollowed out in the bright red sandstone, which bear unmistakable traces of their monastic origin.

A few feet above the ground is a long gallery, beyond which vaulted chambers have been hewn out. One of these was evidently; a chapel for there are distinct remains of a piscina and aumbry and the place where the altar stood is visible, but the paintings above it (an Archbishop saying mass and the instruments of Our Saviour's Passion) have quite disappeared. On the narrow red sandstone ledge outside this gallery the monks must have sometimes stood and gazed on the tangle of

green below.

Travellers along the high road beneath would often come to beg help for soul or body. In the winter when snow and frost had made their journey perilous and toilsome, how thankful they must have been for a refuge from the storm. We can scarcely realise with what feelings a belated wayfarer on the dark road, and approaching an unknown ford, hailed the light above, or heard the faint tinkle of the chapel bell ringing for Vespers.

In stormy weather and when the floods were out, the monks must have found the climb along the path to the church a hard and weary pilgrimage but in those days a man both learned and expected to endure hardness "as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

Here abode the monk Layaman. He says of himself at the beginning of his history or "Brut," "there was a priest on earth who was named Layaman, he was son of Leovenath - may the Lord be gracious to him! - he dwelt at Areley, a noble church upon Severn's bank - good it there seemed to him - near Redstone where he books read."

A record of him still remains in Areley King Church, where on the old Norman font base is roughly inscribed:

### TEMPORE LAYAMANNI SANTI

One may imagine him toiling up and down the path from his cavern dwelling to the church which he served - it stands on a hill about half a mile away.

Layaman "read books till it came into his mind that he would tell the noble deeds of Englishmen." There was an outburst of intellectual vigour in the Welsh Marches at the end of the twelfth century and this book was written in 1206 - a poem in the English tongue considered by Bishop Creighton to be full of the national spirit which ten years later compelled King John to sign the great charter.

He "travelled far and wide over the country to procure the noble books which he took for his authority. He took the English book which St. Bede made, a second in Latin he took which St. Albin made, and the fair Austen who brought Christianity in hither. Layaman laid these books before him and turned over the leaves; lovingly he looked on them (may the Lord be good to him),

pen took he in his hand and wrote on book skin and put together the true words and combined the three books.”

The “ Brut “ begins with the flood and is in the form of a poem-containing thirty thousand lines. (There are two MSS in the British Museum.)

He ends by begging his readers to pray for his own soul and the souls of his father and mother.

The old highroad from North Wales London crosses the river Severn here - over this ancient ford the body of Prince Arthur eldest son of Henry VII was carried from Ludlow (where he died ) to be buried in Worcester Cathedral.

A little distance away near the picturesque town of Bewdley, once the capital of the Wyre Forest are some more caves in a very grand and imposing position, for they are cut in a great crag on a hill overlooking the Severn. There is no long gallery here, but there are several rooms - in one a great hole in the roof communicates with a cleft in the rock, evidently the chimney. In another the place where the altar stood is quite visible, as also the shelves of an aumbry, and a piscine.

Stukeley speaks of this hermitage in his "Itinerarium Curiosum “ and gives a view of the curious cells.

Eyton tells of another near Bridgnorth, the ancient town where in 912, Ethelfreda, daughter of King Alfred, built a fortress.

The “ road through Morf Forest before it attains the summit of the hill which faces Bridgnorth on the East passes under a cave hewn out of the red sandstone rock of the district. “ The spot is still called the “ Hermitage, “ and tradition says that the brother of King Athelstan ended his days here in retirement from the world - certainly it was of Saxon origin and was known as the “ Hermitage of Athelardstone in the forest of Morf. “

The Severn passes within four or five miles of the Malvern Hills where are some caves which were no doubt inhabited by hermits. One of them may have been the abode of the Saxon monk who may almost be considered the founder of Malvern Priory as he was the first to come and settle on the hill where afterwards others followed him. He must have needed courage, for he had to make his way through the great forest before reaching the hill. Several miles away is a cave just below the earthwork fortification raised by the Ancient

Britons on the summit of one of the hills. They entrenched themselves here against the attacks of the Romans, and tradition tells that Caractacus

The hilltop is said to have been used earlier by the Druids for the giving forth of laws and judgments and may have been the scene of Druidical sacrifices. (There are signs of a temple on the Summit.)

Outside the vellum, a little way down is the cave, cut out of such hard black rock that the making must have been a stupendous task. The astronomical calculations of learned men seem to show that it was made in pre-historic times for Sun worship.

From the entrance of the cave the hermit could look over the steep wooded glen to the wide and wild plain stretching out towards the Welsh mountains. The offerings of the country people no doubt helped to provide his simple fare, and water could be obtained from the well below just within the wood. It is still called “ the Holy Well, ” and the name of St. Walm is connected with it.

Many land marks of the past have been ruthlessly swept away, but these cave dwellings are so full of historical interest that it is to be hoped that they will be preserved from injury and allowed to remain and bear record of times so unlike our own that it is difficult for the imagination to picture the life of those days, such as Spenser describes it when the aged hermit says to the traveller “ now day is spent.

Therefore with me ye may take up your In For this same night.” The Knight was well content;

So with that godly father to his home they went. A little lowly Hermitage it was, Downe in a dale, hard by a forest’s side, Far from resort of people that did pas In traveill to and froe; a little wyde

There was an holy chappell edifyde Wherein the Hermite dewly wont to say His holy thinges each morne and eventyde: Thereby a christall streame did gently play Which from a sacred fountain welled forth alway”

The Faerie Queen Book I Canto I.

Note. This is the text of an undated illustrated booklet given to Sylvia Beamon by Bari Hooper

A TV COMPANY IS TO PRODUCE A SERIES ON THE HISTORY OF THE LONDON UNDERGROUND SYSTEM AND IS ANXIOUS TO HEAR FROM MEMBERS WHO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.

SOCIAL HISTORY IS PARTICULARLY NEEDED. HAVE YOU ANY INTERESTING STORIES?

INCLUDED IN THE HISTORY ARE THE WWII USES OF THE UNDERGROUND STATIONS AND LINES AS AIR RAID SHELTERS, FACTORIES ETC.

CONTACT MALCOLM TADD IN THE FIRST INSTANCE

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